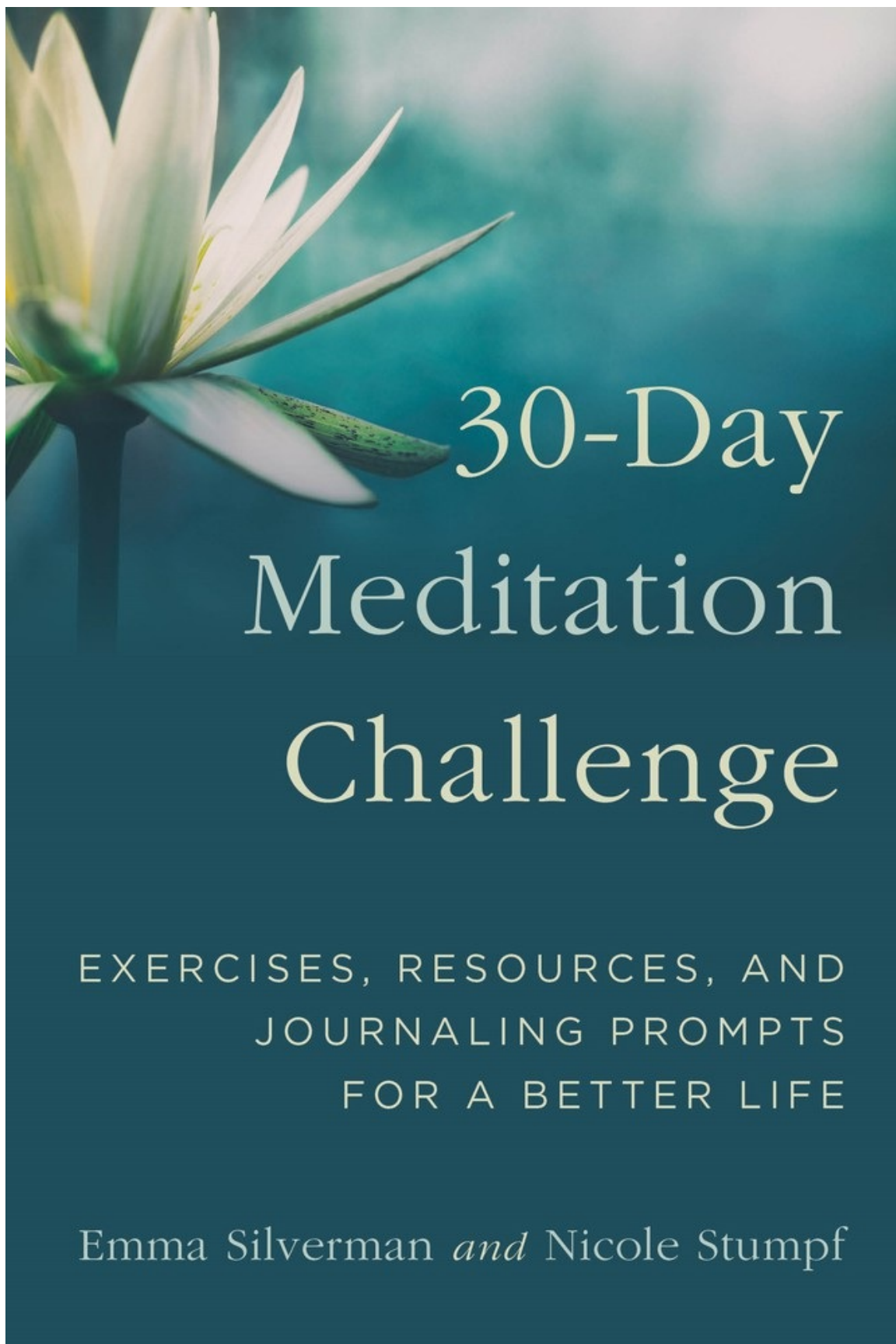




# 30-Day Meditation Challenge

EXERCISES, RESOURCES, AND  
JOURNALING PROMPTS  
FOR A BETTER LIFE

Emma Silverman *and* Nicole Stumpf



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Helios Press

**Note: this title was originally intended as a print edition. Journal entries should be created and chronicled in a journal or on separate paper.**

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## **Dedication**

To Ilana Claire Berman. —ES

To my parents, who laid the foundation upon which  
I've been able to live out my dreams, and to my unwaveringly  
supportive and loving husband, Peter. —NS

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# ***Introduction***

Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom —  
Aristotle

You've probably heard that a regular meditation practice has the potential to make you feel amazing—physically, emotionally, and mentally. The trick is actually doing it. This is why we invite you to join us for a 30-day Meditation Challenge.

In this book, we have included thirty of our favorite meditation practices, a diverse range of techniques we have discovered and developed over the years. We will also share a few words of encouragement or inspiration to help keep you . . . well, encouraged and inspired! These meditations are placed in order from what we consider least to most challenging, to ease you into daily practice. We have some experience in these matters, but ultimately, this is subjective—if you want to go out of order, feel free!

We introduce each meditation with a little information on its history, purpose, and benefits. From there, we explain how to perform each technique. Finally, we offer inspirations for reflection and space for reflective journaling after each meditation. We strongly suggest reading the journaling prompts only after you have already meditated; we don't want them to create expectations for your experience.

You might be wondering: "I'm a total beginner, can I participate?" Simply put, yes! We all have an instinct to turn inward and allow for rejuvenation, but it is often overridden by distractions in our lives. This practice is about reconnecting to the parts of our body, mind, and spirit that are already primed for meditation. A beginner's mind is often the greatest asset you can bring to the table.

To prepare, we suggest getting the following items together:

- A pen or pencil: To log your practice in the journaling pages, note observations, document your emotions, and reflect. We'll give you some prompts to help with this part, but you are free to reflect as you choose. You might decide to draw a picture or write a poem. Totally up to you.
- A timer: If you'll be using your phone, just make sure it can in no way distract you from yourself. Do Not Disturb mode is key.
- Support from those you live or work with: Give people a heads-up that this is something you are trying to do for yourself and let them know their support and encouragement (especially as life gets busy) will be deeply appreciated.
- Uninterrupted time in your schedule: Carve out at least fifteen minutes in your day, every day, for undisturbed meditation. Maybe even mark it in your planner. Having a routine can be helpful (such as meditating every day at 7:30–7:45 a.m.), but being flexible with your schedule is a valuable skill too. Just do your best to plan ahead.

You can meditate anytime, anywhere, and with anyone. At the end of the challenge, you will have spent at least seven and a half hours in meditation!

Give the practice time—some meditation styles work their magic slowly and only with patience. Who knows? One of these meditations may just change your life.

*Nicole and Emma*

# ***Meditation Day 1***

Counting Backward

**ABOUT:**

Counting backward isn't just limited to "beers on the wall." The *Visuddhimagga*, a Theravada Buddhist text written in fifth century Sri Lanka, describes counting meditation as a way to draw the attention back to the breath when the mind wanders. Seon Buddhists have claimed that if you can count down from one hundred to one and then back up again without breaking focus you will attain supernormal abilities. More generally, this introductory meditation technique pops up in many different lineages with small variations on the execution.

**PRACTICE:**

Find a comfortable position to practice in and set your timer for fifteen minutes.

Begin by breathing gently, fully. As you exhale, mentally say "fifty." As you inhale, mentally say "forty-nine." Exhale, "forty-eight." Inhale, "forty-seven," and so on.

Count backward on both the in-breath and the out-breath until you reach "twenty"—then count only the exhales. Silently count "twenty" as you exhale. Then, instead of counting "nineteen" on the in-breath, do nothing, just inhale. With the next exhalation count "nineteen" and continue until you reach zero. When you reach zero, stop counting, but stay aware of the natural flow of breath in and out.

This exercise usually takes seven to ten minutes. When you are done, you may wish to repeat it or count forward until fifteen minutes has passed. If not, simply sit and observe how you feel after a single round. The choice is yours.

**JOURNAL:**

Take some time to reflect on your experience with this meditation. Was it challenging, effortless, or some place in between? How did you feel at the end of the fifteen minutes? There's not a right or wrong way to feel. There's benefit to simply paying attention, regardless of the observations you make.

## ***Meditation Day 2***

# Three-Part Breath

## **ABOUT:**

This is the first breathing technique Nicole and Emma learned, so it holds a special place in our hearts. We were both introduced to *Dirgha* (*deer-gah*) *Pranayama* in yoga classes, where this breathing style creates unity between the mind and the body. The word *yoga* itself is sometimes translated as “yoke;” in our yoga practice we are yoking the physical (the breath and body) to the mind. *Dirgha Pranayama* promotes optimal diaphragmatic breathing (deep belly breaths), relaxes the mind and body, oxygenates the blood, and encourages the release of residual carbon dioxide from the lungs.

## **PRACTICE:**

Lie on your back and make yourself comfortable. Practice each stage of this meditation technique for approximately five inhales and exhales. First, watch your breath for several rounds, without controlling it. Observe the lengths of the breath and where you feel the body expanding and softening with each inhale and exhale. Then, place your hands on the abdomen and begin “belly breaths”; feel the breath rise in the belly toward your hands on the inhale, and move away from the hands on the exhale.

Next, place your hands on your ribs. On each inhale, breathe into the abdomen, and then the mid-chest (feel the mid-chest rise with your hands). Breathe out from the mid-chest and then the abdomen.

Finally, place your hands on the upper chest. Breathe into the abdomen, mid-chest, and then upper-chest (feel the upper-chest rise with your hands). Breathe out from the upper-chest, mid-chest, and then the abdomen. The breath moves like a wave, from the lower part to the upper part of your torso with each inhale, and from the upper part of your torso back down to the belly with each exhale. This is your full breath.

Continue to breathe in this way for the remainder of your meditation, but with the arms resting at your sides.

## **JOURNAL:**

Was this the first time you breathed this way? What was the effect on your body

and mind? Did you notice your mind drifting during the practice? If so, where did it go?



***Meditation Day 3***  
Concentration Practice

**ABOUT:**

Nicole first encountered this technique in a book she picked up at a “Friends of the Library” book sale in Ithaca, NY. *Concentration: Approach to Meditation* by Ernest Wood, published in 1949, provides a series of practical techniques that one can use to cultivate the ability to focus the mind, a prerequisite for a meditative experience.

**PRACTICE:**

Choose something—anything—to focus on. It can be something concrete and simple, like envisioning your cat (can you tell that Nicole and Emma have three cats between the two of us?), or expansive and broad, like the idea of Love. This will be the object you concentrate on. Commit to it. Then, while seated, set your timer and write down every word you can think of that relates to that object. When the mind wanders come back to the object of focus.

As an example, Nicole chose the word *home*. In the first minute, she wrote down:

*House, live, door, roof, bed, brown, street, rooms, childhood, nest, apartment, floors, kitchen, neighbor, roots, address, cat, lock, enter . . .*

After noting each thought, she silently said the word “home” in her mind, waited until the next thought arose, and wrote it down.

If you have an important decision to make, try this meditation and perhaps the answer will organically appear!

**JOURNAL:**

Did any insights or breakthroughs arise for you during this practice?

## ***Meditation Day 4***

Reporting the News

## **ABOUT:**

Nicole learned this meditation technique while taking workshops and reading the books of Erich Schiffman. While the name “Reporting the News” is his, the practice is as old as meditation itself. We think this practice is, for some, more difficult than the previous two because it transitions from techniques with a specific focus point to passive observations of your current state of being and surroundings. Emma finds that when she no longer has one thing to focus on (or, rather, obsess over), she’s less likely to report the news than her own hang-ups, worries, and anxieties of the day. The challenge is to report your experience without judgments, opinions, or emotional attachments.

## **PRACTICE:**

Find a position to meditate in and then, simply, begin to report what’s happening. It might look something like this:

*I’m feeling tired . . . I’m thinking about how my boss was a jerk today . . . I’m planning dinner . . . I’m breathing into my abdomen . . . I’m remembering that I have to take the clothes out of the dryer . . . I’m hearing the delivery van drive by . . .*

You don’t need to write all these things down; you are just mentally reporting the news to yourself. This helps you get into the practice of paying attention to what you’re thinking about, how you’re feeling, and what you’re aware of. Eventually, this practice can help your thoughts feel less scattered and out of your control.

## **JOURNAL:**

Nicole says, “I find it helpful to have a little notebook next to me when I ‘Report the News.’ If I have a thought that is related to remembering something I want to do, I take a moment to write it down, and then let it go. Sometimes a creative idea pops into my head, and I’ll write that down too, so I don’t lose it.” We recommend having your journal at the ready during this meditation. If you feel inspired, take notes!

***Meditation Day 5***  
Ocean-Sounding Breath

## **ABOUT:**

In every branch of yoga, you are likely to find practices related to breathing. These breathing practices were given the name *pranayama*. *Prana* means vital life force and *yama* means to observe or control. When we control our breath skillfully, we can influence the energy in the body and alter our state of mind. Researchers from Columbia University and New York Medical College have found that when exhalations are longer than inhalations, *and* there is a bit of vibration to the breath there is a reparative effect on the nervous system. This style of breathing, *ujjayi* (ooh-jai) *pranayama*, also increases activity in the parts of our brain that allow us to sense where we are in space (proprioception) as well as what's going on inside of us (interoception). It also stimulates the regions in the brain related to memory and feelings of empathy, and decreases activity in the areas related to fear and anger. This *pranayama* got the nickname "Ocean-Sounding Breath" because the inhales sound like a growing wave and the exhales sound like that same wave crashing to shore.

## **PRACTICE:**

Find a comfortable seated position. Close your eyes and gently allow the upper lip to rest on the lower lip. Breathe long, even breaths into and out of your nose. Now begin to imagine a mirror at the tip of your nose. On your next exhale, pretend you are fogging up that mirror. Imagine that same mirror at the base of your throat. When you feel comfortable with the exhale, continue to the next part: on the inhale, start to imagine that you're fogging up that mirror at the base of your throat. This should create a deep, sonorous breath. We recommend practicing for five minutes if it's your first time trying this breathing technique and gradually working up to ten to fifteen minutes.

If at any point you start to feel tense or light-headed, or after five minutes of trying Ocean-Sounding Breath for the first time, return to the *Dirgha Pranayama* practice of Day 2.

## **JOURNAL:**

Have you noticed any shifts in your comfort with meditating since the beginning of your Meditation Challenge? Was today easy or challenging? Did time move

quickly or slowly? Note any and all observations you made during this mindful breathing practice.

# ***Meditation Day 6***

Walking



## **ABOUT:**

Think you have to be perfectly still to meditate? Not so, jitterbug! In the Buddhist practice of *kinhin* (“sutra walk”), monks take breaks from long periods of seated meditation by stretching their legs and expanding their minds. Traditionally, this practice is done in a clockwise circle, with each step taken after a full breath. Practitioners make a fist with one hand, wrapping four fingers around the thumb, and place that hand palm-down in front of the heart. The other hand encloses the fist. The rest of the body is strong and erect—like a mountain.

There is a beautiful quote about *kinhin* from Zen Master Anzan Roshi: “It is not mindfulness of walking, stepping, or even of a step. It is mindfulness of this step, and this step, and this step.” Walking meditation is a continual reminder of the transitory nature of our experience. With each step, there is a wealth of new details available to contemplate.

## **PRACTICE:**

Head outside, preferably to a place with some natural beauty. Take it in through all of your senses: the sights, the sounds, and the feel of your feet on the ground and of the air on your skin. Notice when your mind has wandered, and then kindly guide your awareness back to your walking meditation. It doesn’t matter where you are coming from or where you are going. Walk for the sake of walking. This may be in a line, a circle, or (most likely) a mix of both. Return your awareness to the body, the breath, and the setting you’re walking through.

## **JOURNAL:**

You may often feel pressure to have your life be goal oriented and to “accomplish” something on a regular basis. How did it feel, in your body, to move without a specific goal of going somewhere? Did you find yourself creating destinations that did not, in reality, exist?

***Meditation Day 7***  
Sit and Smell the Spices

**ABOUT:**

In the tradition of Tantra Yoga, the mind, body, and senses are all instruments through which the universe takes pleasure in itself. The senses, also known as *indriyas*, can be used as a focus for meditation practice. Meditation is about cultivating presence to the moment-to-moment experience of being alive. Just like the scent of fresh-baked cookies might snap you to attention, you can use your sense of smell in meditation to find the present moment.

**PRACTICE:**

Find a comfortable seat. Have a large assortment of your spice jars (or teas) in front of you. Set the timer and begin to smell the spices one at a time. Take them in. Are you more attracted to some and more averse to others? Notice how they make you feel. If a particular smell sparks an emotional response within you that you want to sit with, take time to pause, breathe, and feel—then move on to another spice when you're ready. No rush.

**JOURNAL:**

Our sense of smell is more linked to memory than any of the other four senses. During this exercise, what thoughts, ideas, or memories arise?

## ***Meditation Day 8***

Legs Up the Wall and Even Breathing

## **ABOUT:**

We hope all the Sanskrit in the title didn't scare you off! Nicole and Emma are both yoga teachers and a lot of our meditation practices are rooted in yogic traditions. We can't help but sneak in some yoga postures to our meditation! The benefits of this position read like a laundry list: it can regulate blood flow, reduce menstrual cramps, improve digestion, rejuvenate after a long day on your feet, relieve lower back tension, help promote restful sleep, and—if you can believe it—even more.

## **PRACTICE:**

Legs Up the Wall Pose (*Viparita Karani*) is exactly what it sounds like: a pose with the torso on the floor (or a yoga mat, or another cushy surface) and the legs straight and vertical against a wall. If this is uncomfortable, you can place your calves on a couch, keeping the knees bent at a 90-degree angle.

Even Breathing (*Sama Vritti*) also is pretty self-explanatory: the lengths of the inhale and exhale are equal (or even) and the breath is smooth and fluid. Count to a number that allows you to breathe completely, but without strain. Count to that number as you inhale, and count to the same number as you exhale. Continue this practice for approximately fifteen minutes, observing the *Sama Vritti*.

## **JOURNAL:**

Did you notice a shift in how you felt physically (Heavy? Tense? Relaxed?), mentally (Racing Thoughts? Brain Fog? Steady Mind?) and or emotionally (Anxious? Depressed? Calm?) after this practice? If so, try to describe it.

# ***Meditation Day 9***

Body Scan

**ABOUT:**

The “body scan” is the bedrock of mindfulness meditation. While mindfulness, generally speaking, is a component of every practice listed in this book, mindfulness meditation has come to refer to a specific series of techniques popularized in the West by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Thanks to his work, there are mindfulness centers in most North American cities and research on the effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction at fancy educational institutions like the University of California at Los Angeles, Johns Hopkins University, and Harvard University. The body scan both strengthens our ability to focus and teaches us flexibility of the mind. Practice being attentive to the body in a nonjudgmental way. This is a key skill at the heart of every yoga and meditation tradition.

**PRACTICE:**

Set a timer for the length of time you plan on meditating—we find we sometimes fall asleep doing this exercise, so make sure you wake up when you need to!

Lying down in a comfortable way, close your eyes and let your heart rate slow to its resting pace. Begin to observe your body in your own way, at your own pace. Let your awareness drift through your body in any sequence—from head to toes, from hair to skin to muscle, from base of the spine to crown of the head—pick what works for you. Notice where the mind lingers and where it is easiest to attach your awareness to sensations: Is it easier to notice specific sensations by the head? The heart? The back? You might even bring your awareness to specific persistent aches and pains. If you let your focus stay on that spot for a sustained time does the sensation increase, decrease, or stay the same? Or does it change into something completely different? If you find the mind wandering, bring it back to the part of the body with the strongest sensation and go from there!

**JOURNAL:**

Are you hanging in there? A dear, inspiring friend who participated in this challenge in the past shared this with Nicole: “I’m a little behind, but I’m committed to the seven hours of meditation in a month, and giving myself

forgiveness for already missing a day.” If you’re a little (or a lot!) behind on whatever goal you’ve set, be kind to yourself for all you’ve already done. We invite you to journal about all of the other ways you’ve taken care of your physical and mental well-being this week.



# ***Meditation Day 10***

I Am

**ABOUT:**

As a mantra in Tantra and Kriya Yoga, *So-Hum* is a phrase repeated during meditation to seek cosmic connection and universal truth. It appears throughout the *Upanishads* (more than two thousand years old, the *Upanishads* are one of the central texts of Hinduism). Dr. Vasant Lad, in his book *Ayurveda: The Science of Self-Healing*, describes the sound “so” as the universal consciousness and the “hum” as the individual consciousness. By repeating the sounds together, you can discover the connection between the self (“hum”) and everything in the universe (“so”).

**PRACTICE:**

Find a comfortable position to practice in. First, allow your eyes to survey the surrounding environment, your ears to receive its sounds. Relax your muscles. After spending some time observing this external world, close your eyes and bring your awareness from the outside to the inside. Soften around the sensory organs. Bring your attention to the breath: let it be deep, but effortless. Take several breaths this way.

Then,

As you inhale, think to yourself “So.”

As you exhale, think to yourself “Hum.”

Repeat this mantra for ten to fifteen minutes, or for as long as you like.

**JOURNAL:**

Describe your experience. Is this a meditation that you would like to revisit in the future or did it not work so well for you? Resist the temptation to allow either answer to be a judgment or an evaluation. It’s just an observation.

# ***Meditation Day 11***

BRFWA

## **ABOUT:**

BRFWA stands for:

Breathe

Relax

Feel

Watch

Allow

Nicole and Emma learned this practice at the Kripalu (*kree-pah-loo*) Center for Yoga & Health. It is a foundational technique in the Kripalu Yoga practice and has been taught at the center for many decades. This series of suggestions for how and where to focus your attention are useful not just in seated meditation practices, but also during yoga practice.

Today, you will follow BRFWA with suggestions for how to interpret the practice. In time, you might come up with your own definitions for each stage, and develop your own technique and style.

## **PRACTICE:**

Begin seated or lying down.

**Breathe:** Notice your breath. You might choose to observe it without much influence, or you might intentionally begin breathing in the three-part breath (*dirgha pranayama*) or ocean-sounding breath (*ujaayi pranayama*) style. You are free to explore and experiment with the breath in any way.

**Relax:** Soften the muscles of the face, relax the shoulders, find an effortless “honey belly.” Do a body scan and observe where you feel the most relaxed, and where you feel tension. Gradually invite your entire body to relax.

**Feel:** What do you feel? Emotions? The air on your skin? The draw of your body toward the core of the earth? Your heart beating? Ask yourself, “What do I feel right now?” and see what you notice. Over time, your sensitivity will deepen and

your sensory repertoire will expand.

**Watch:** Observe the mind. What are you aware of: Feelings? Thoughts? Sounds? Smells? An absence of thought? As you focus your awareness, practice letting the objects in your awareness arise and pass in their own time, attaching to nothing, pushing nothing away.

**Allow:** Practice the art of allowing. Be with what is—the breath, the body, the emotions, the thoughts—exactly as they are. Can you be content (the Yogic concept of *santosha*) with whatever is present for you in the moment? Can you release all judgments and evaluative thoughts? Can you rest in pure awareness?

You can move through BRFWA in a linear way, or you can hop around from one point of focus to the next. In the beginning, you will most likely have less control over where your attention focuses, so you might just be “reporting the news.” Here are some examples: “Oh wow, I was just thinking about my job (that’s watching!)” or “Oh wow, I just noticed that deep belly breathing feels very grounding (that’s breathing!)” or “Oh wow, I didn’t realize my chest was tense until it just released (that’s relaxing!)”

## **JOURNAL:**

What did you do or notice when you focused your attention on the **breath**?

What did you observe when you focused on **relaxing**?

What were you able to **feel**?

Were you able to **watch** thoughts arising in your mind? What do you recall thinking about?

Did you have an experience of being able to **allow** yourself to be in the moment, without imagining what you might do in the future, or recalling past events?

# ***Meditation Day 12***

Loving-Kindness

## **ABOUT:**

*Metta* is a Pali word that we would translate as “loving-kindness.” While the concept of meditating or praying on love, benevolence, and goodwill to others can be found in most world religions, this particular practice has its roots in Theravada Buddhism.

You might also be familiar with the word *metta* in relation to the LA Lakers player formerly known as Ron Artest, who, in 2011, changed his name to Metta World Peace. This meditation probably won’t make you want to change your name, but we hope it will change your outlook.

## **PRACTICE:**

Choose any comfortable position, seated or lying down. Close your eyes and relax. Begin by picturing yourself, seeing yourself clearly in your mind’s eye. See yourself in a place of joy and peace. Say to yourself, silently, “May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be peaceful.” Repeat that message three times in total.

Next, picture a person you love and who loves you perfectly and completely. See this person surrounded by light and say to them, “May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be peaceful.” Repeat that message three times in total.

See the image of a neutral figure in your life. The checkout person at your grocery store, your neighborhood postal worker, or a librarian, for example. Imagine this person with just as much love and light as the person you love perfectly. Say to them, “May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be peaceful.” Repeat that message three times in total.

Create a picture of someone you are currently struggling with. Maybe someone you need to have a hard conversation with or who, you believe, creates roadblocks to your happiness. It might be challenging (and it’s okay if it is), but see this person with compassion, love, and kindness. Say to them, “May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be peaceful.” Repeat that message three times in total.

Finally, we bring this message to all beings, everywhere. End the practice with a

global message of peace and light. Wish to all beings: “May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be peaceful.” Repeat that message three times in total. Afterward, sit in stillness and observe your thoughts.

**JOURNAL:**

Emma’s mom, who introduced her to yoga and meditation, was once led through a *metta* meditation in a group yoga class. At the end, half of the room was crying. Did you have an emotional response to this meditation? If so, did you feel resistance to the emotions or did they flow like Emma’s mom’s tears?



## ***Meditation Day 13***

Alternate Nostril Breathing

## **ABOUT:**

*Nadi Shodhana* is a breathing technique (*pranayama*) commonly taught in Hatha Yoga. The word *nadi* refers to energy channels, numbering in the many thousands, which Hatha yogis believe run through the body. “Shodana” means purification. *Nadi Shodhana*, then, is intended to unblock and cleanse the flow of energy in the body.

If you have nasal congestion, this is probably a meditation to revisit in the future. During this practice, we breathe smoothly into and out of the nose (never the mouth). If you start to feel anxiety about trying to keep track of the breath or “doing it correctly,” return to the practice of *Sama Vritti* (Day 8 of this book) and know that you can always try *Nadi Shodhana* again later. Who knows? One thing meditation teaches us is to let go of our assumptions and expectations. Tomorrow this practice might feel just right.

## **PRACTICE:**

Find a comfortable seated position. If you’ve never tried this meditation before, we recommend placing a fluffy pillow or two on your lap (not required, though, as you’ll soon see). Place your left hand on your lap or the pillow.

The right hand will find something called *Vishnu Mudra*: curl your pointer and middle finger in toward the palm. Keep the thumb, ring, and pinky finger extended but without strain. You might feel a stretch along the wrist, hand, and/or forearm. Take a few normal breaths into and out of the nose, of approximately the same length inhale and exhale, with the eyes gently closed.

Close your right nostril with your right thumb and inhale through the left nostril slowly and steadily. When that breath has naturally completed, close the left nostril with your ring finger so both nostrils are held closed for a brief moment. Then open just the right nostril and exhale slowly and completely. Inhale through the same side, the right nostril, at the same pace that you exhaled. Once the inhale is complete, briefly hold both nostrils closed. Open your left nostril and release breath through the left side. Repeat the practice from the beginning, inhaling through the left, pausing with both nostril closed, exhaling through the right, inhaling through the right, pausing with both nostrils closed, exhaling

through the left, and so on. End the practice with an exhale through the left nostril.

Throughout this practice the breath should maintain a slow pace—no desperate inhales or rushed exhales.

For your first time trying *Nadi Shodhana*, try continuing this cycle for about five minutes. If you find that it's tiring to keep your right arm lifted, that's what the pillows are for! Use as many pillows as you need until your right elbow can rest comfortably. For the remaining ten minutes, continue *Nadi Shodhana* or practice *sama vritti*.

### **JOURNAL:**

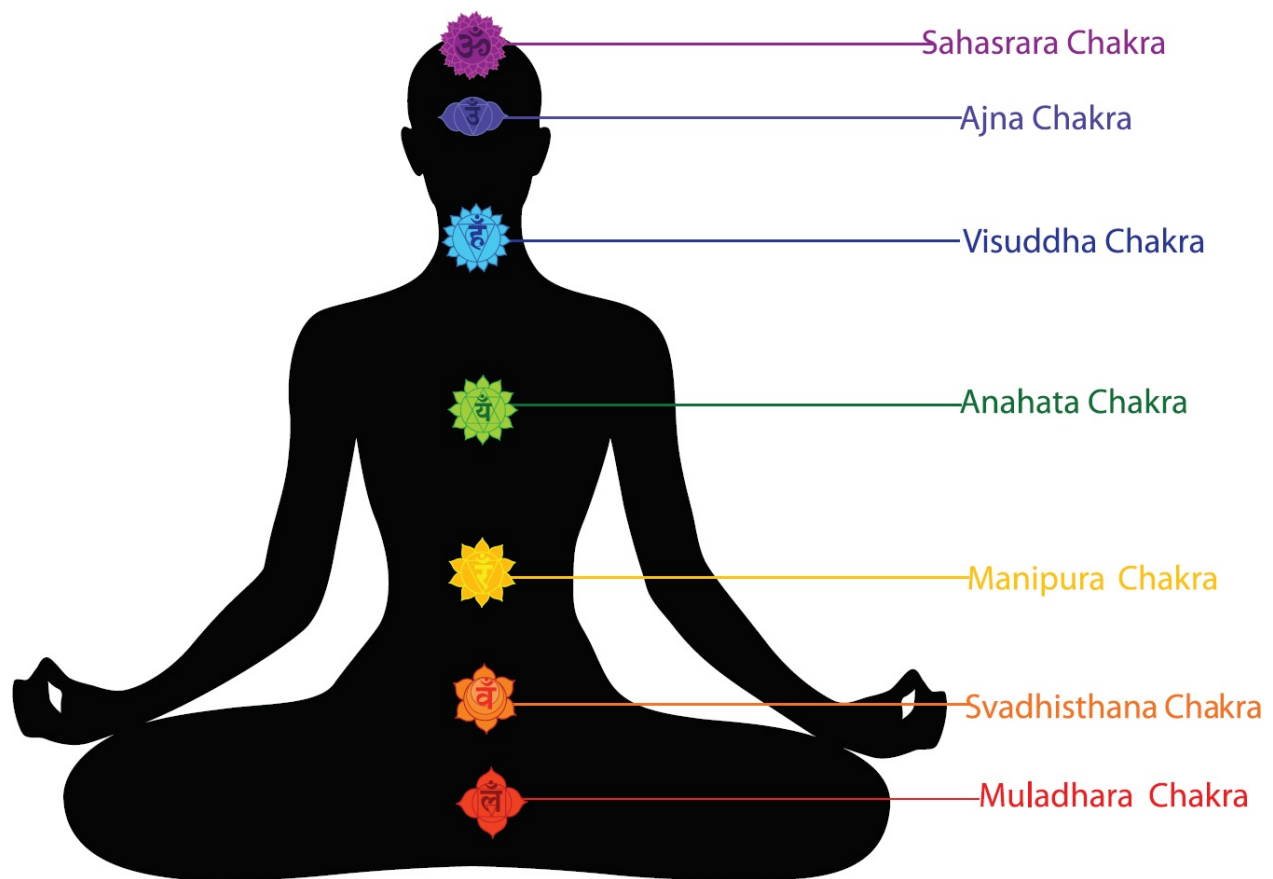
This style of breathing is often used therapeutically to find relief from the symptoms of anxiety and depression. It can energize you when you are fatigued and calm you when you are excited. Did this style of breathing have a noticeable effect on your state of mind?

# ***Meditation Day 14***

The Chakras

## ABOUT:

The *chakras* are a series of seven energy centers found along the midline of the human body, approximately located by the base of the spine, the sacrum, solar plexus, heart, throat, “third eye,” and crown of the head. Anatomically, these points correspond to nerve plexuses and endocrine glands. While the meaning over time varies, the word *chakra* appears in Vedic texts over two thousand years old and is a part of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain doctrine. Present-day students of yoga will practice postures to stimulate the chakra centers and affect the energy within, bringing excessive and/or deficient energy centers into a state of balance and alignment.



## PRACTICE:

Sit in a chair, with your feet firmly planted against the earth about hips-width distance apart. Close your eyes and begin steady, even breathing (*sama vritti*). After several stabilizing breaths, begin to imagine energy moving up from the

ground, through your legs, eventually reaching the crown of your head. At the same time, imagine vital energy moving into your body with each inhale, and unneeded energy—stress, anxieties, tension—leaving it with each exhale.

Now, let the energy moving up from the earth and the energy from your inhale meet at your root chakra, located at the base of the spine. See the energy at the root chakra moving in a healthy, bright clockwise circle. The energy from the earth and the oxygen reinforce the clockwise circle, as it turns bigger and brighter. During the exhales, simply maintain awareness of the present moment. Stage by stage, move your awareness from the root chakra upward, eventually reaching the crown chakra at the top of the head. We recommend moving from one chakra to the next like a ladder, from bottom to top: the base of the spine, the sacrum, solar plexus, heart, throat, “third eye”, and crown of the head. The energy you infuse to the first will benefit the second, and so on. After you have lit up all of the chakra centers of the body, complete the meditation by imagining all of the chakra centers spinning in a brilliant clockwise circle together, drawing energy from your breath and the earth.

### **JOURNAL:**

What was your experience working with the chakras like? Did you find this subtle aspect of your body/mind easy or difficult to connect to? Did you notice if any of these energetic centers felt excessively energized, deficient, or balanced?

# ***Meditation Day 15***

Qigong

## **ABOUT:**

Hearing the word *qigong*, you might get the mental image of a bunch of grandmas and grandpas wearing loose clothing and moving around slowly with their arms out. Or, maybe that was just Emma when she went on family vacation to Florida as a child. Qigong, which loosely means “energy cultivation,” is an ancient Chinese practice that focuses on the movement of energy in the body. This can be done in a medical setting (by a healer working with the energy in the patient’s body), in dynamic movement (like martial arts), or—as you will practice today—in a meditative form. You will focus on a *dantian*, or a *qi* (pronounced “chee”) energy center—specifically the lower *dantian*.

## **PRACTICE:**

In a seated position, close your eyes. Bring your awareness to the lower *dantian*, about two inches below the navel and in toward the center of the body. Relax your whole body so that energy may flow more freely. For this same reason, relax the breathing, letting it flow without obstruction. Find deep, belly breathing.

Imagine your inhales traveling into the lower *dantian*, drawing energy (or *qi*) in from the outside world. With your exhales, imagine that energy radiating throughout the rest of your body, and even sending healing energy out into the world. Feel the *qi* gathering and building in your *dantian*. Inhale and exhale here for ten to fifteen minutes.

After you feel complete in this practice, gently open your eyes. If it feels right, physically respond to this meditation by rubbing the palms together vigorously, or rubbing along the arms, legs, or torso. It may also feel good to move the body in tune with the movement of energy in your body, or to sit still and observe.

## **JOURNAL:**

Did you sense the lower *dantian*? Were you able to move energy throughout the body? Did anything surprise you? What was your overall experience?



# ***Meditation Day 16***

Kundalini Mantra

## **ABOUT:**

When Emma worked at the Kripalu Yoga Center, she signed up for a Kundalini Yoga workshop having never heard of the practice before. During that workshop, she did a Downward Facing Dog for a timed five minutes, wrapped her hands around her ankles and walked around the room like a deranged elephant, chanted a ton, and hyperventilated (or so it seemed to her at the time). It was an intense experience. Ten years and a lot of information later, she knows that Kundalini yogis visualize a vast reservoir of energy, taking the form of a snake, that resides at the base of the spine. Through a series of exercises, many of which Emma experienced during that workshop, Kundalini-ists hope to awaken the sleeping serpent, eventually finding physical, emotional, and spiritual transformation.

The particular practice you are focusing on today is for creating more balance in your life.

## **PRACTICE:**

Bring the body into a comfortable seated position with a long spine and the crown of the head pressing toward the sky. Rest the back of your hands on your knees and find *Gyan Mudra*—thumb covering the fingernail of the pointer finger, like you’re saying “okay.” Close your eyes.

In this practice, you will move your awareness to specific points in your body while mentally chanting *Har Har Wa-he Guru*. This meditation is more complicated than what we have practiced up until this point, so we’ve organized it in numbered stages.

1. Inhale deeply and hold your breath. Continue to hold your breath through steps 2 through 6.
2. Mentally chant the mantra Har (rhymes with ‘car’) as you pull your navel slightly toward your spine and upward.
3. Move awareness to your heart center and mentally chant the second Har.
4. Move awareness to your throat center and mentally chant Wa (rhymes with ‘la’),
5. Awareness at your brow point, or “third eye,” as you think He (sounds like ‘hey’),

6. Finally, imagine the sound Guru (“gu-roo”) at the top of your head.

Repeat the mantra mentally while guiding your awareness upward through the body as many times as you can while holding your inhalation without strain. Exhale and hold the breath out repeating the same process during the exhale (Har Har Wa-he Guru along the midline of the body from navel to third eye).

Note that it’s pretty common to be able to repeat the mantra more times on the held inhale than the held exhale. It’s also pretty common that for the first practice, you might only have the ability to repeat Har Har Wa-he Guru once before needing to exhale or inhale; don’t worry if that’s the case!

Continue for about five minutes, and then pause for a few minutes, to observe the effects. If you feel finished, be finished. If you’d like to explore this further, continue for a total of fifteen minutes.

### **JOURNAL:**

Did you notice a shift in your energy level after this practice? How about your mood? Any changes in the body?

## ***Meditation Day 17***

Thich Nhat Hanh's Mindfulness Practices

## **ABOUT:**

Thich Nhat Hahn is a Vietnamese Zen master and meditation teacher who has dedicated most of his life to teaching peace throughout the world. He has written dozens of books on meditation and breathing techniques. Two of our favorites are *Being Peace* and *You Are Here: Discovering the Magic of the Present Moment*. Today's meditation is modified from *You Are Here*. This is a meditation practice to cultivate gratitude while strengthening a connection to the physical body.

## **PRACTICE:**

Find a comfortable sitting position. Acknowledge a part of your physical body or mind that you are grateful to have in working order—in his book, Thich Nhat Hahn recommends the eyes. Using your breath, on the inhale say to yourself: “Breathing in, I am mindful that I have eyes that are still in good condition.” On the exhale, say to yourself: “Breathing out, I smile to my eyes that are still in good condition.” In place of eyes, you can substitute whichever part of yourself you have chosen—you can use “heart,” “legs,” or even something mental, like “self-confidence.”

If you are acknowledging a physical body part, see that body part in your mind's eye, envisioning it as you feel its presence. For example, if you are sending gratitude to your right leg, you might notice that the leg is warm and tucked underneath the left leg. Or being mindful of your nose, notice that it is clogged in the right nostril at the same time as you call up an image of it. In this way, we improve our mind-body connection at the same time we're being thankful for that very same connection! You can meditate on the same place throughout the duration of the practice, or move to various places throughout your body-mind.

## **JOURNAL:**

What part or parts of yourself did you choose to focus on during this practice?  
What did you notice?

# ***Meditation Day 18***

1:2 Breathing

## **ABOUT:**

Many ancient *pranayama* practices (breathing techniques) focus on extending the length of the exhale. That may be because, as we now know, long calm exhales can strengthen the parasympathetic nervous system. This part of our nervous system controls our “rest and digest” activities, so when it is supported you sleep better, are more relaxed, peristalsis (the process of moving nutrients and waste through the digestive system) is improved, and the conditions are set for healing to naturally occur.

The breathing technique you are trying today might be best practiced before you go to sleep or if you are feeling anxiety at some point during your day. It's important to note that although it's called 1:2 Breathing, you are *gradually* working toward that ratio, and probably won't achieve it on your first, second, or even third practice. Be patient, observe the breath, and don't push it past its comfortable limits.

## **PRACTICE:**

Lie down on your back with a carpet, blankets, or a yoga mat underneath the body. If you have neck discomfort, you can place a rolled-up blanket or flat pillow underneath the neck. Place your hands on your abdomen and close your eyes.

Begin with long inhales and exhales through the nose, noticing how the belly rises and falls with your breath. Count the length of your inhales and exhales, bringing them to the exact same length. Breathe this way for approximately ten to fifteen cycles of breath.

Then, begin to slowly extend the length of your exhales. For example, if your inhales and exhales were at a count of five, keep the inhale to five counts, but extend the exhale to six counts. Breathe like this for three full rounds. Afterward, again extend the exhale by another second (five second inhales, seven second exhales) for three full rounds. Continue until the exhale is twice the length of the inhale, but return to a normal breath if tension enters the body or if you feel a struggle for air. This is supposed to be a relaxing breath, so avoid making it a contest with yourself to see how far you can go. You will receive a lot of benefits

even if the exhale is just one second longer, so no need to push it!

**JOURNAL:**

When we are upset or panicking, the breath tends to be in the chest and rapidly paced. Slowing the breath down tends to settle the mind. What did you notice about the effect this practice had on your mind? Did the body feel relaxed and/or relieved after the practice?



# ***Meditation Day 19***

Visualization

**ABOUT:**

While we were writing this book, Nicole's daily meditation became a practice of visualization. The steadiness of mind that was cultivated by her previous practice allowed her to comfortably sit and imagine how she would like her day to unfold. She found that this skill allowed her to greet the day with greater clarity and intention. Often, the days would unfold exactly as she imagined, though sometimes they did not. The "trick" is to be graceful when surrendering to the reality of the day and to not be attached to any particular outcomes.

In today's meditation, you will guide yourself through a series of images. This practice is about living your day with intention and purpose, so, accordingly, meditate at the beginning of your day.

**PRACTICE:**

Find any comfortable position and close your eyes. Picture yourself seated or lying down, the shape of your body, and the expression on your face. Then, even as you stay in meditation, begin to imagine the rest of your day as proceeding from the current moment. See yourself exiting from your meditative position, stretching, and moving into the next part of your day. Stage by stage, envision small scenes from your day, in the order that they will occur. Perhaps you will see yourself traveling to work, eating, showering, exercising, or engaging with friends, family, or coworkers. What projects would you like to initiate, work on, or see through to completion today? See yourself and guide yourself through the best possible outcome of each of these scenarios.

At the end of your visualization practice, you may have also arrived at the end of your day or still be envisioning the first hour of your day. Either is perfect!

**JOURNAL:**

How did this practice make you feel? Do you feel excited for your day? Nervous? Empowered? Overwhelmed? There isn't a right answer. Just notice! You might also want to reflect at the end of the day on how this practice impacted the way it unfolded.

# ***Meditation Day 20***

Meditation on Music

**ABOUT:**

Emma wrote this practice in a coffee shop, with hip-hop in the background, people talking to each other, and her meditation books taking up more than her share of the table. It's fair to say that the music was not getting much of her attention. We listen to music while driving, cleaning the house, in the background of our favorite shows, or while dancing at a concert. Some of us even listen to it with a critical ear, face scrunched up, for work. How often, though, do we listen to music without doing anything else? Not busy with other things, not judging, and certainly not being judged for our musical tastes.

**PRACTICE:**

Find some place comfortable, warm, and distraction-free. Have your phone in a completely different room than you. If you have a landline, turn the ringer off. Choose an album that you'd like to spend some time with, set your timer if you'd like, hit play. And listen. Set the intention to just listen. To receive with all of your senses. Immerse yourself as completely as possible with the music you've selected. Deep, mindful breathing will help this process.

**JOURNAL:**

What emotions arose while listening to this album with an open mind and no distractions? How did you respond to these emotions? Did any memories, perhaps of other times you heard this music, bubble to the forefront?

# ***Meditation Day 21***

Gazing

## **ABOUT:**

*Tratak* meditation is said to stimulate the “third eye” or the sixth chakra. This chakra (or energy center) is associated with concentration, awareness, focus, and even (purportedly) psychic abilities. We will delve deeper into third eye meditations later on, but here’s a gentle introduction.

*Tratak* meditation is a fixed-gazing practice. It involves choosing an object to focus on, and then sustaining that focus by staring at that object for a period of time. Traditionally, the flame of a candle is used. We, however, do not recommend you stare at a flame, because we’re not convinced it’s a perfectly safe thing to do—retinal damage is a concern. Instead, we suggest you choose something else—preferably not the sun or a light bulb either—to fix your gaze upon. It can be something small and simple, like a thimble, or it can be something more complex and meaningful, like a painting. Nicole met a coach who would do *tratak* meditation with his team using a basketball and a woman who found *tratak* with plants improved her skills as an herbalist. You can also stare at something that does not have much significance to your life, like a spoon, which will still offer you an anchor point, possibly with less emotional distractions. Basically, the object you choose for *tratak* is up to you.

## **PRACTICE:**

Find a comfortable seated position in a well-lit room that allows you to easily view your object. Stare at your object for a maximum of five minutes at a time. Occasionally, close your eyes or look off into the distance to give your eyes a rest, but continue to visualize the object in your mind. If you have eye issues, or experience troublesome tension or pain in the eyes while attempting this practice, we suggest opting out. Instead, revisit a meditation from a previous day.

## **JOURNAL:**

Describe your experience with the *tratak* meditation, both during the meditation as well as after releasing your gaze and closing the practice.

# ***Meditation Day 22***

Prayer Beads

## ABOUT:

*Japa Mala* involves the repetition of a mantra or an idea, such as a Sanskrit prayer or thoughts of gratitude. A tool that's used to support this style of meditation is a *mala*, which comprises of 108 beads connected on a string (very much like a rosary). *Japa Mala* was made famous by Elizabeth Gilbert when she structured the text of *Eat, Pray, Love* into 108 individual chapters and described meditating in this way.

## PRACTICE:

If you do not own a *mala* or a rosary, you can count out 108 beans, grains of rice, or anything else. Place two bowls in front of you: one containing the beans (for example) and one empty. During your meditation, transfer them one at a time from one bowl to another.

One way that Nicole likes to practice *japa* is to use her *malas* and each time she touches a new bead, she thinks about a person who she loves and is grateful for, holding their image in her heart. When she feels ready, she moves onto the next bead. You can try this if you want or, if you prefer to use a mantra, we can offer you the first one we ever learned:

*Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*

(a loose translation is: “*Om*, I bow to the divinity of all beings”)

Here's some help with the pronunciation:

Om: *ohm*

Namo: *nah-moe*

Bhagavate: *bah-gah-vah-tay*

Vasudevaya: *vah-soo day-vie-uh*

Go through one repetition with each of your 108 beads, beans, or whatever you are using. Spending ten seconds or so with each bead will take about fifteen minutes.



**JOURNAL:**

Simply reflect on the impact this practice had on your body, mind, and connection to divinity.

## ***Meditation Day 23***

Breathing Through the Limbs

## **ABOUT:**

Have you ever taken a yoga class, and the teacher instructed you to “Breathe into your hips/hamstrings/shoulder/other part of the body that isn’t a lung”? Were you, rightfully so, a little confused as to how that is possible? As yoga teachers, Nicole and Emma both have been guilty of asking students to “Breathe into [some body part],” without giving a whole lot of clarification about what that actually means. For today’s meditation, we’ll explain what many yoga teachers mean when they say this!

## **PRACTICE:**

Although you cannot literally breathe into body parts except the lungs, you *can* do it energetically. To achieve this, sync the flow of in-breaths and out-breaths with the movement of your awareness. So, for example, you can inhale and guide your awareness from the sole of the right foot all the way up to the right hip socket, and then exhale while guiding your awareness from your hip socket back down to the foot. That’s what we mean by “breathing through the limbs.”

Try this one leg at a time: sole of foot to hip and back and forth.

Then one arm at a time: fingertips to shoulder and back and forth.

Then both legs together.

Then both arms together.

Then you can get creative. Try some of the following:

- Breathing awareness along the spine, tailbone to crown of head
- Inhaling awareness into the core of a body part and then exhaling awareness out to the perimeter. This works well with, but is not limited to, the hands, feet, and heart
- Inhaling awareness along the front of the body, and exhaling awareness along the back
- Inhaling from the feet to the navel center, exhaling from the navel to the crown, and then reversing the flow.
- Inhaling awareness into the core of the whole body, and exhaling out to the

perimeter of the whole body.

It might surprise you how long you can entertain yourself playing with this. It is deeply relaxing, and promotes tremendous strength and flexibility of the mind.

**JOURNAL:**

So, did it work? Could you breathe through the limbs? How'd it go?

## ***Meditation Day 24***

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

## **ABOUT:**

The mind and the body share an intimate bond, and they often reflect the quality and condition of one another. Nicole finds that when she releases tension from her body, she also releases tension from her mind. Not only does this feel great, it also creates space to think new thoughts, rest into the moment, and experience deeply satisfying qualities like contentment, clarity, and gratitude. It's a liberating and empowering experience, learning to let go.

Today's meditation is a variation on a technique first described by an American physician named Edmund Jacobson almost one hundred years ago.

## **PRACTICE:**

Lie down somewhere comfortable and remain awake and alert throughout the practice. As usual, begin with long, smooth inhales and exhales, becoming more aware of the body and the breath with each passing moment.

There are essentially two steps to progressive relaxation:

1. Bring your attention to the targeted part of the body, for example your right foot. On a *held inhale*, intentionally apply muscle tension to the right foot, maybe by curling the toes in or arching the foot. Hold the breath and let the tension build for five seconds.
2. On a long, *not-held exhale*, release all of the tension from the targeted body part. The muscles should relax completely and achieve a state of ease that did not exist before you tensed the muscles. Breathing in and out steadily, notice the difference in the (again, for example) right foot from before and after the exercise.

When you feel ready, move on to the next part of the body, following the same two steps. It might be easier to go from head to toes (or vice versa) so that you don't skip any parts.

If you feel pain or severe discomfort (or have a recent injury), avoid practicing progressive relaxation there. Of course, if you have any questions about your physical capabilities to perform this meditation technique, check in with your physician. If you would prefer to be externally guided, see what you can find

online. There are an abundance of meditation recordings out there—for free—that use the “progressive muscle relaxation” technique.

**JOURNAL:**

Did you find this progressive muscle relaxation technique to be an effective style of meditation for you? What do you notice about the relationship between tension in your body and your state of mind?

# ***Meditation Day 25***

Seated



## **ABOUT:**

As the name implies, Zazen has roots in Zen Buddhism. As the story goes, the Buddha was sitting in meditation when he became enlightened. By regularly performing this style of meditation, an intensive study of the self, students of Zazen may also find enlightenment.

## **PRACTICE:**

Sit in a wooden chair where both feet can be firmly planted against the earth. Move your torso forward and back, then right and left in space until you find a neutral position for your spine and rest balanced on your sitting bones. The chin is parallel to the floor and the neck and facial muscles are without strain. Let the eyes soften to a spot a few feet in front of you on the floor, eyes half-closed, both seeing and unseeing the ground in front of you. Place both hands palm facing upward on your lap, with the palms resting on one another.

To prepare, allow the breath to be unforced and natural. Practice relaxed breaths into and out of the nostrils, noticing the fluctuations of the air as it travels through the body. As your attention deepens, focus primarily on the exhale.

Eventually, we will find *zhiguandazuo* (or, in Japanese, *shikantaza*). In this difficult form of meditation, there is no point of focus (like the breath, the body, or an external object, like a candle or music). One translation we have heard of this practice is “just sitting.” Allow the mind to become a witness to itself, observing passively and without reacting. If the mind starts to wander and get lost in images, desires, thoughts, etc., come back to the breath. And then again, let the attachment go. Let the thoughts go where they will, and observe.

## **JOURNAL:**

Did you find this practice challenging? Do you feel that the previous meditation practices in any way impacted your ability to enjoy or be averse to this practice?

***Meditation Day 26***  
The Wisdom of the Body

**ABOUT:**

Some believe that the ultimate purpose of yoga, by cultivating health and a stronger mind-body connection, is to prepare the body to sit for long periods of meditation. Indeed, the first recorded asanas, or postures, were all directly related to meditation. Nicole and Emma feel that if the physical body is in poor health, it is hard to focus on the development of the mind.

Take any lessons you learned from the Body Scan (Day 9) and Breathing Through the Limbs (Day 23) and cultivate the Wisdom of the Body.

**PRACTICE:**

Today we suggest that you consult the wisdom of your body. Tune in. Try entraining the mind to your heart. Place a hand over your heart and take some slow, steady, complete breaths. Do you feel, hear, or envision an impulse for how you want to spend time with yourself today? Follow your intuition. If you have a yoga practice, you might spontaneously move the body through postures. Even if you've never tried yoga before, you might sense your body wanting to move or drop into stillness. You can roll your head and neck, wiggle your fingers, open and close the jaw, or curl into a ball. Patiently follow the body's guidance, whether that be through stillness or movement. Observe the mind's response to the sensations of the body.

**JOURNAL:**

What happened when you attuned to the wisdom of your body?

# ***Meditation Day 27***

Third Eye

## **ABOUT:**

Third Eye Meditation combines some of the skills we developed during the Chakra (Day 14) and Gazing (Day 21) meditations. In this advanced practice, the meditator focuses intently only on the third eye (*ajna chakra*). As your practice becomes even more advanced, you might notice during the Chakra Meditation that one chakra (or nerve center) seems like it needs your attention. If that is the case, it's perfectly all right to substitute that chakra for the third eye meditation offered here. The preparation and instruction is the same.

As a cautionary note, both Nicole and Emma have, on occasion, gotten headaches while trying this meditation technique, and neither can be 100 percent sure what caused that response. If you start to feel an uncomfortable pressure or eye strain, we recommend switching over to a focus on your heart.

## **PRACTICE:**

Finding a comfortable seat and an easy posture, close the eyes. As the Sufi poet Rumi says, "Close the two eyes to see with the other eye." Begin to focus your attention between the eyebrows, and a little inward toward the brain. The location is similar to where a Bindi is applied to the forehead in Hindu traditions.

Begin to imagine the breath moving into and out of the third eye. The color associated with the third eye is indigo, so the breath can take the form of a bright indigo light moving into and out of the third eye. You might find that the indigo light wants to move, taking the form of a spiral or a pulsing light. Keep your awareness to the third eye and as the mind wanders, draw your attention back to the *ajna chakra*.

## **JOURNAL:**

What was your experience in this meditation? What did you notice? Was the mind steady and able to focus easily on the third eye point, or did you notice a lot of activity in the mind?

# ***Meditation Day 28***

Being with Nature

**ABOUT:**

Animism, the oldest known belief system in the world, assigns divinity and spirit to objects, places, and creatures within nature. While the specifics vary greatly from culture to culture, animistic religions believe all living things have a soul. For example, some Maori communities in New Zealand have been observed offering thanks to sweet potatoes as they dig them from the earth.

Today's meditation emerges from the animistic belief that finding peace and calm is best done in the wild.

**PRACTICE:**

Take a journey to your favorite place in nature, whether in your backyard or a city park. For the first five minutes (or more), observe everything that is occurring around you. Use all of your senses. What does the air smell like? When you touch the bark of a tree, how does it feel against your skin? What do you see? What sounds are present? Become a passive, but keen, observer.

For the second stage of this meditation, make the same or similar observations as in the first stage. This time, however, take a moment to thank each living object or animal. For example, thank the air for smelling of pine. Thank the tree for its rough bark. Thank yourself for your ability to notice and pay attention.

You can repeat this meditation as many times as you like, simply by walking a few yards to a new spot, and finding the spirit in all you see.

**JOURNAL:**

What, if anything did you enjoy the most about this meditation? What, if anything, did you enjoy the least?

## ***Meditation Day 29***

Meditation on the *Koshas*



## **ABOUT:**

The *Koshas*, according to Vedantic philosophy, offer a model for teasing apart the different layers of the self. Those layers are the physical (*annamaya kosha*), energetic (*pranamaya kosha*), emotional (*manomaya kosha*), the Witness (*vijnanamaya kosha*), and the True Self (*anandamaya kosha*).

When you can nonjudgmentally observe layers one through three (the physical, energetic, and emotional), you're doing that observation from layer four (The Witness). When you are unwaveringly rooted in layer four (The Witness), you can realize level five (your True Self).

Most of us, most of the time, are stuck identifying with the ever-changing layers of our physical, energetic, and emotional selves. Meanwhile, we are completely unaware of our True Self, or even the Witness. The first three layers are volatile, always changing. It's disorienting! Identifying exclusively with these layers, without awareness of the higher ones causes suffering. The True Self is like the blue sky behind clouds that are always shifting and changing in size, location, and structure. When we arrive at layer five, we've found that which is permanent, unchanging, and true.

That being said, baby steps, folks. You will focus today on the Witness, eventually setting the stage for the True Self.

## **PRACTICE:**

Set aside some time to simply be with yourself. To witness (remember, level four!) yourself. For fifteen minutes, just notice what you notice. Practice identifying which layer(s) of yourself you're witnessing. For example, this might go as follows:

*. . . that's a car driving by. What am I witnessing? I'm witnessing my ears hearing and my mind interpreting. The hearing is part of the physical layer. The interpretation is part of the mental layer . . . I feel my heart beating. That's physical. I'm witnessing my physical layer. My actual, physical heart. But I also feel an emotion there. My mind is telling me it's love . . . I'm witnessing something energetic . . . I'm going to choose to focus on my energetic body now .*

*. . I feel energy moving freely and easily in my abdomen . . .*

Memorizing the layers (*koshas*) is not as important as *practicing the art of being a witness*. Remember that the witness doesn't have any likes or dislikes, and doesn't make judgments or evaluations. All of that activity is part of the emotional/mental level, which we worked with in earlier meditations, like Reporting the News (Day 4).

**JOURNAL:**

Which Koshas were you able to observe? Do you feel like you connected to the level of consciousness known as the Witness? Did you get a glimpse of your True Self?

## ***Meditation Day 30***

Thank You for Everything

**ABOUT:**

This is Emma's favorite meditation, and has been for almost ten years. If you're familiar with her other books, you know she always ends with this mantra. She no longer remembers where it first crossed her path; a quick Internet search ascribes it to a Zen Master named Sono. We believe that some lessons take a while to learn. The same issue might arise again and again until we learn the lesson intended. Emma is still learning from this mantra.

**PRACTICE:**

This last meditation is intended to help you bring your practice off the meditation cushion and into the every day. From the beginning of today until the end, every time you start to feel your mind going to a dark place (a complaint, a catty remark, a judgment against yourself or others), say to yourself "Thank you for everything, I have no complaints whatsoever." Don't worry if you forget to say it until you get pretty deep into the negative thought spiral: say it when you remember, and then say it again and again.

"Thank you for everything, I have no complaints whatsoever."

**JOURNAL:**

Your 30-Day Meditation Challenge is complete! What's alive in you? How do you feel? What insights have you gained about yourself—your body, mind, breath, and spirit?

Where will you go from here?